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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000189

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: BUHARI ON OBJ, ALLIANCES

ABUJA 00000189 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas Furey for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 24, Deputy Chief of Mission and visiting AF/W Deputy Director Donald Heflin met with All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari at his Kaduna residence. Buhari opined about the current Obasanjo-Atiku impasse, characterizing it as another signal of Obasanjo's attempts at prolonging his term in office. He also speculated about whether the ANPP would join forces with other opposition parties, including the Action Congress (AC) and Democratic Peoples' Party (DPP), but appeared defiant that the number of Northern candidates did not harm his campaign. Talk of alliances and swapping out his vice presidential running mate will continue, possibly until the February 20 deadline, after which time Buhari will formally launch his campaign. END SUMMARY.

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"Killing Three Birds with One Stone"  
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¶2. (C) General Buhari averred that the current impasse between President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku has sown disharmony in the political process since the final selection of candidates should have taken place by the INEC stipulated date of December 22. He described the impasse as "hostage-taking politics" and a lucid example of Obasanjo's last ditch effort at sabotaging the democratic process. He asserted that, at this point, Obasanjo had exhausted all his options, including an effort to impeach Atiku, which Obasanjo contrived to "produce an uprising which would lead to a declaration of a state of emergency and eventual elongation." Buhari added that Obasanjo has attempted to "kill three birds with one stone," alluding to the potential impeachment of Atiku, the move against anti-third term National Assembly members, and the silencing of Ibrahim Babangida. In the end, Buhari remains confident that in the lead up to April, Obasanjo can "still cause more damage."

¶3. (C) Moreover, Buhari contends that the Obasanjo-Atiku quarrel is about power, money, and saving face. He believes that Atiku's handling of the entire situation has been "dishonorable" though Constitutionally-protected and commented that Atiku should resign and then contest.

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Talk of Alliances, Swapping Out the VP  
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14. (C) When asked whether the number of Northern candidates (including Atiku, Yar'Adua, Bafarawa) would weaken the North's ability to regain power, Buhari admitted that, while still a matter of concern, the plethora of Northern candidates testifies to a somewhat functioning political process. He noted that there had been considerable efforts to reach consensus across opposition parties, and that such consensus "would have been ideal." Importantly, however, he did not rule out the eventual possibility of an alliance with other parties, including the Action Congress (AC).

15. (C) Though he dismissed media reports that claim he met with Atiku during his weekend trip to London, Buhari did acknowledge that a strategy to force Obasanjo out is currently being developed. In particular, he outlined that the opposition parties are weighing their three main options: (1) alliance, where every party maintains its individual integrity and develops a scheme for equitable power-sharing; (2) merger, where each party foregoes autonomy to form one unified party; and (3) fusion, where one party subsumes the rest. The ANPP, Buhari noted, had categorically rejected anything less than an alliance. To that end, the ANPP recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the AC Chairman to further discussions on the possibility of an alliance. These discussions will continue between now and February 20 when Buhari expects to officially launch his campaign.

16. (C) He also mentioned that he met with Sokoto State Governor and Democratic Peoples' Party (DPP) presidential aspirant Attahiru Bafarawa to discuss an alliance. Previously, in the United States, Buhari met with Bafarawa to dissuade him from running for president. Buhari added that he believed Bafarawa was not qualified to be president since he was only "concerned for himself" and had no "real experience."

ABUJA 00000189 002.2 OF 003

17. (C) Aside from formal political alliances with Nigerian opposition parties, Buhari has also assiduously tried to forge alliances with members of the Nigerian diaspora. Since 2002, Buhari has been reaching out to various diasporic communities in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, whom he notes are well educated but cannot "see themselves" in Nigeria today. This past weekend, in fact, Buhari met with the diaspora community in the United Kingdom, soliciting their support (and, possibly, funds). During a 2005 trip to the United States, Buhari addressed the World Igbo Congress based in Houston, who gave him a warm reception. His advisor, Lawal Idris, also noted Buhari's February plans to visit the Nigerian diaspora in the United States. In addition to possible campaign finance from the diaspora, he is receiving funds from other ANPP State governments, local governments, and private donors.

18. (C) When asked about what led to his decision to name Edwin Ume-Ezeoke as his running mate, Buhari stressed that he was a "good man." Furthermore, Buhari revealed that other prospective candidates from the South-West and South-South had entered into negotiations prior to the December ANPP primaries, but had "reluctantly stepped down." He added that Senate President Ken Nnamani, whom Buhari expects to decamp from the PDP in the coming days to join the ranks of the ANPP, would not be able to serve as his running mate given the limited timeframe for swapping out candidates. He remarked that were Nnamani to be named his vice presidential running mate, the courts would delay his case and ultimately prevent him from standing with Buhari. Also, Buhari seemed to suggest that discussions over the ANPP's final choice for vice president were still underway.

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Elections Must Hold, Otherwise OBJ Impeachable  
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19. (C) Buhari expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of

voter registration throughout the country, opining that INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu's confidence in the process was exaggerated since Buhari knows personally that most rural areas in the country had yet to be registered. Buhari remains hopeful that elections will hold in April, remarking that the National Assembly, including those members who are being "punished" for opposing Obasanjo's bid for a third-term, "has seen through the government's blatant efforts at postponement" and will not allow a delay in elections. He stated that failure to conduct elections by the stated timetable is "also impeachable."

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What the U.S. Can Do  
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¶10. (C) When asked about what the United States can offer to aid in the conduct of free and fair elections, Buhari responded that with 120,000 polling stations in a country as large as Nigeria election, monitoring is vital, though difficult. While acknowledging that the political parties and Nigerian non-governmental organizations will monitor the elections, Buhari stressed that foreign observers are much more credible and trusted. He suggested that American and international observers should concentrate their efforts in likely flash-point regions, i.e. the South-East and South-South, where rigging, intimidation, and violence were most likely. Were free and fair elections to take place in April, Buhari insisted, he would take 55% of the vote nation-wide and 75% in the North alone. Buhari said that the "ruling party will do everything to make sure they remain in power." He added that the United States had kept Obasanjo's ambitions at bay by speaking out against his bid for a third-term. Had the bid been successful, Buhari commented, it would have effectively "forced Nigeria to become a 1-person system."

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Comment: Buhari Knows the Terrain  
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¶11. (C) Clearly Buhari is trying not to make the same mistakes he made in 2003. He has learned that attempting to take his grievances to the courts ended in nothing less than failure. This time around, Buhari appears much more savvy and apt at understanding the political terrain. By broadening his base of support and actively campaigning in the influential, wealthy diasporic communities of the Igbo in

ABUJA 00000189 003.2 OF 003

particular, Buhari is stemming the power base of the PDP.  
END COMMENT.  
CAMPBELL